



News Release

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Environmentalists, Off-Highway Enthusiasts Support OHV Extension Bill

On Monday, April 2, the Assembly Transportation Committee passed a measure by Assemblyman Juan Vargas (AB 723) that would extend California's Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Program for four years while off-highway vehicle enthusiasts and environmental interests continue to meet to resolve conflicts between the two interests. The bill passed the committee by a 12-0 vote.

California's OHV program has been in existence for more than 30 years and annually provides recreational opportunities for more than three million people. The program is funded through registration fees on off-road vehicles and fuel taxes associated with off-road recreation.

The Vargas bill is sponsored by the Davis Administration and also has the support of off-highway enthusiasts, environmental organizations and law enforcement agencies. Submitting letters of support or speaking in favor for the legislation included the Sierra Club, California Wilderness Coalition, Planning and Conservation League, California Off-Road Vehicle Association, California Motorcycle Dealers Association, California Sheriff's Association, California Association of Four-Wheel Drive Clubs, Blue Ribbon Coalition, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, California-Nevada Snowmobile Association, California League of Off-Road Voters, American Motorcyclist Association, Motorcycle Industry Council, Imperial County, California Police Activities League, and the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business of Imperial County.

Support for the bill is reflective of the membership of the OHV Stakeholders Roundtable, an advisory group to the OHMVR Commission and the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division of California State Parks. The Stakeholders Roundtable was convened in May 2000 at the direction of State Parks Director Rusty Areias and has been meeting monthly. Stakeholders agreed unanimously to support the bill at their February meeting and also abstained from offering independent amendments to the legislation without concurrence from other stakeholders.

"AB 723 provides the Legislature, the Davis Administration, and all those interested in off-highway vehicle recreation issues the opportunity to continue rational and in-depth

discussions related to this increasingly controversial subject, “ said David L. Widell, Deputy Director of State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division. “Although agreement on all issues is perhaps an unrealistic goal, stakeholders are already making progress on a number of items. The straightforward, yet short-term extension of the program captured in AB 723 allows that process to continue and will provide the legislature much more meaningful and objective information when the full reauthorization of the program ensues,” he added.

It is intended that recommendations from the OHV Stakeholders Roundtable will subsequently be incorporated into a new OHV program for California which will be more reflective of a State, and population, that is markedly different from that of which existed when the program was created in 1971.

The bill would extend the program from January 2003 to January 2007, thereby providing the Stakeholders Roundtable the necessary time to address a variety of complex and controversial issues in advance of a comprehensive review of the program that will commence in 2005. California State Park’s OHV program has been reviewed and reauthorized since 1982. The OHV program’s sunset was last extended in 1995.

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